

Faculty of Music - University of Toronto

Sunday Scholarship Series

March 5, 1978

3 PM

Melvin Berman, oboe

Lorand Fenyves, violin

Uri Mayer, viola

Stanley McCartney, clarinet

Thomas Monohan, double bass

Vladimir Orloff, cello

Patricia Parr, piano

Eugene Rittich, French horn

Christopher Weait, bassoon

Walter Hall

Edward Johnson Building

PROGRAM

Quintet for piano, oboe, clarinet, bassoon
and horn Op. 16

Beethoven

Grave, Allegro ma non troppo
Andante cantabile
Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

Patricia Parr, piano; Melvin Berman, oboe; Stanley McCartney,
clarinet; Christopher Weait, bassoon; Eugene Rittich, French horn.

INTERMISSION

Septet Op. 20 E^b Major

Beethoven

Adagio, Allegro con brio
Adagio cantabile
Menuetto
Tema con variazioni: Andante
Scherzo: Allegro molto e vivace
Andante con moto alla Marcia: Presto

Lorand Fenyves, violin; Uri Mayer, viola; Eugene Rittich, French
horn; Stanley McCartney, clarinet; Christopher Weait, bassoon;
Vladimir Orloff, cello; Thomas Monohan, double bass.

Program Notes

Today's all-Beethoven program is devoted to two works, the Quintet Op. 16 for piano and woodwinds and the Septet Op. 20, both early works.

In 1797, Goethe was in Weimar at the ducal theatre, Washington was relinquishing the presidency to Adams and Napoleon was rapidly approaching Vienna. Haydn, at the height of his fame, had written the Op. 76 quartets and was working on the Creation; Mozart had died 6 years before.

In Vienna, amidst the fury of impending war, 27 year old Beethoven was enjoying a growing reputation as virtuoso pianist and composer. On April 6th at a concert given by Schuppanzigh, the Quintet Op. 16 received its first performance.

The Quintet for piano, oboe, clarinet, French horn and bassoon is one of several pieces for woodwinds that Beethoven wrote at that time (the horn sonata Op. 17, Sextet for Woodwinds Op. 71, and the Sextet for horns and string quartet Op. 81b). Paul Henry Lang has drawn attention to the vast popularity of woodwind instruments in Vienna in the late 18th century. Apparently considered outdoor instruments, they were played on street corners and in parks and gardens any time of day or night. Beethoven's preoccupation with woodwind chamber music was a reflection of its commercial value. The trend, however, came to an end with the close of the 18th century; Beethoven's last woodwind chamber work is the Septet Op. 20.

The quintet combination poses problems for the composer in terms of balance and coherence, due to the striking differences in timbre of the instruments. The situation, however, is handled with felicity by Beethoven, and in fact the problem becomes an advantage in terms of the wider variety of tone colours the ensemble affords.

The Quintet combination is not an original one, indeed Mozart's Quintet K. 452 for the same instruments is very likely the model for Beethoven's. The striking parallels between the two would indicate this. Both are in three movements with a long breathed adagio to the first and a rondo third movement. Both are in the same key, with the second movement of each in the dominant. Even details of the construction of the rondo are identical: the piano states the rondo theme solo, then it is taken up by the woodwinds.

The Quintet was published simultaneously with an arrangement for piano quartet. In a letter to his publisher, Hoffmeister, Beethoven explained that the arrangement might make it more salable. Fortunately, the original version, which we hear today, prevailed.

In modern theory of psychology, seven is a magical number. It is the maximum number of pieces of information that the human mind can keep track of simultaneously in the short term. By coincidence--or instinct--Beethoven in his Septet Op. 20 uses the maximum number of voices that the mind can distinguish and thus achieves a remarkable variety without losing the identity of the individual voices.

The Septet was completed in 1800, given its first performance April 2 and became immediately popular. So much so that in his later years Beethoven came to dislike the piece, because its popularity eclipsed that of his later works. The Septet (along with Schubert's later Octet Op. 166) is in the tradition of the divertimento. As its name implies, the divertimento was meant to be light and entertaining in character. Its form was that of several short movements (between 4 and 10) including dance forms, like the minuet, a theme and variations and a rondo. Mention should be made of the prominence of the violin in Beethoven's Septet, with its bravura and short cadenzas, reminiscent of the gallant style where the first violin always leads the show.

The Quintet and Septet are products of what is referred to as Beethoven's early period (prior to 1803). Written before the 1st Symphony in C Major, Op. 21, Beethoven is as yet untroubled by deafness and this music betrays little of the brooding harshness and daring that later made him a musical revolutionary. That by no means disparages these two works whose humour, lightness and technical mastery are amply evident.

In both works, the proportions and formal structures are simple and lucid, development of ideas is concise, melodic lines are clear and straightforward, and the texture is predominantly transparent. In short, the works embody all the characteristics we assign to classical style. Indeed, in these two works, Beethoven bares his classical traits to full view.

Notes by Douglas McNabney

NEXT EVENT: Opera Department's Production of Don Giovanni, March 6 and 7, MacMillan Theatre, 8:00 p.m.